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ABSTRACT

This practicum addressed the effectiveness of a social skills training program with adolescent students identified as "at risk" and enrolled in alternative education programs. These students had not achieved a high level of prosocial competence which created inadequate emotional and/or behavioral adjustment in the school setting. This increased the rate of disciplinary referrals. Social skills training was a means for addressing socio-emotional development in these students. Students from alternative education programs were nominated by teachers for a social skills training group. Behavior rating scales were completed by teachers and the selected students (N=5). Disciplinary referrals were monitored throughout the implementation period. Structured Learning, a social skills training model, provided a systematic curricula to teach social behavior. Outcomes of this practicum emphasized the need to utilize a conjoint style of intervention, linking social skills training with day-to-day interactions. This practicum demonstrated the success of a "pull out" approach with training groups may be greatly enhanced if transfer of training activities are promoted by the classroom teacher. Skills training groups raised the students' awareness of prosocial competencies. (Author/ABL)

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# Increasing Prosocial Competence of At Risk Adolescents Through a Social Skills Training Program

by

Valerie Lee

Cluster XXXV

A Practicum I Report presented to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Feb. 7, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

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This project is dedicated to "my kids," Charrod, Marc, Melissa, Jimmy, and Jason. I can only hope they learned half as much from me about social skills as I learned from them about adolescents. Many thanks to Dr. Anderson, a patient and caring advisor, who turned discouragement into empowerment.

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## ABSTRACT

Increasing Prosocial Competence of At Risk Adolescents Through a Social Skills Training Program. Lee, Valerie., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, EdD. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Interpersonal Competence/ Prosocial Behavior/ Social Skills Training/ Intervention/ Adolescents/ Elementary-Secondary Education

This practicum addressed the effectiveness of a social skills training program with adolescent students identified as "at risk" and enrolled in alternative education programs. These students have not achieved a high level of prosocial competence which created inadequate emotional and/or behavioral adjustment in the school setting. This increased the rate of disciplinary referrals. Social skills training was a means for addressing socio-emotional development for these students. Through a social skills training program, students would be able to gain greater insight with respect to socially acceptable patterns of behavior. Teacher's ratings of student's behavior should indicate a positive performance change. In addition, disciplinary referrals should show a decrease as students gained prosocial competencies.

Students from alternative education programs were nominated by teachers for a social skills training group. Behavior rating scales were completed by teachers and the selected students. Disciplinary referrals were monitored throughout the implementation period. Structured Learning, a social skills training model, provided a systematic curricula to teach social behavior.

Outcomes of this practicum emphasized the need to utilize a conjoint style of intervention linking social skills training with day-to-day interactions. This practicum demonstrated that the success of a "pull out" approach with training groups may be greatly enhanced if transfer of training activities are promoted by the classroom teacher. Skills training groups raised the students' awareness of prosocial competencies.

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### Description Of The Community

This practicum was implemented in the public school district which serves the central city of a four county metropolitan area. In 1988, a grant proposal was submitted to the Annie B. Casey Foundation outlining a comprehensive plan to deal with issues related to poverty, unemployment, and academic underachievement which impacted on the educational system. Statistics compiled by the New Futures Steering Committee (1988) for that grant proposal gave documentation from a historical perspective of how societal influences have helped to create an "at risk" population within the community.

In the 1960's, the city's population peaked at 300,000 though the 1988 population had declined to less than 200,000. The 1987 population estimates indicated nearly 44,000 school-age youth lived in the city and 47% were black. This city was representative of a typical midwestern city in that it experienced growth during the 1950's and 1960's with a gradual decline during successive decades. The decline, to a great extent, was

attributed to suburban sprawl which was aided by Interstate bypass systems, racial unrest within the inner city, and an increase in crime in the central city.

A chronicle of the city (Ronald, 1981) acknowledged new homicide rates were set in the early 1970's which made suburban living an attractive alternative for whites along with an emerging black middle class which benefitted from civil rights laws passed in the 1960's and 1970's. Those laws opened the doors for a restructuring of housing patterns.

Pre war and wartime urban housing projects had contributed to ghetto development with blacks concentrated in one section of the city while second generation urban Appalachian migrants, who made up a large segment of the white population, were most heavily concentrated on the opposite side of town. There were a number of similarities between the poor urban black population and Appalachian whites including poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, welfare dependency, racial and/or class discrimination. These factors identified these two groups as "at risk" minorities.

Historically, these two groups presented little problem in the public school system for well beyond the post war era, the school system stressed vocational training over academic preparation for higher education. The city survived through its reliance on heavy industry making it possible for the labor market to absorb young adults whether or not they were high school graduates. During the 1970's, there was a shift from manufacturing jobs to service industries and the community of late has set its sight on technological careers. The message has been clear to the educational system. Students exiting the school system during the 1980's needed more preparation with an emphasis on critical thinking skills than students from past decades. A high school diploma in and of itself did not necessarily represent marketable skills and many students were falling by the wayside before they even began their high school matriculation. The stakeholders promoting a need for change within the educational system included, but were not limited to youth at risk and their families, for their future was hanging in balance. The business community had justifiable concerns over its future labor force. The safety net provided by human service agencies

could only be stretched so far. Both the city government and the court system were affected in their efforts to provide safety and stability to the community along with economic viability. Lastly, the school system itself carried the weight of responsibility for preparing students to be self sufficient and responsible citizens. That all encompassing task could not be accomplished within the boundaries of "traditional" education. Thus, alternative educational programs were developed.

**Alternative Educational Programs For The "At Risk" Population**

With the goal in mind to produce well-adjusted, educated, productive and responsible citizens within our communities, educators are constantly experimenting with alternative educational strategies and programs to meet that goal. Though elementary school teachers in this district have emphasized need for early intervention, alternative programs have not generally been introduced until the junior and senior high levels. One program, the Occupational Work Adjustment (OWA) program, has been in operation for a number of years. It was designed for 14 and 15 year old students viewed as potential

dropouts. These students have demonstrated disinterest in the normal academic curriculum and have not achieved success in traditional educational settings. The lack of interest, motivation, and/or achievement is evident when one considers a profile of the typical OWA student. These students have irregular school attendance, have been retained for at least one grade and multiple retentions are common, they fall two or more years behind grade level in math or reading, and they frequently exhibit behavioral problems which require disciplinary intervention. Though efforts are made to maintain an even gender balance in the program, the student population typically falls into a 3 to 1 male/female ratio. The OWA program provides work related and remedial instruction coordinated with a vocational experience for the student. The curriculum, though structured, remains flexible enough to fit varying needs and ability levels of the students. One of the most important program objectives is to enable the student to see the relationship between education and the world of work through their participation in the academic program along with practical on-the-job experiences.

Though the OWA program benefits a number of students from the "at risk" population, the program is limited with respect to enrollment and there are 12 and 13 year old students in the junior high school setting who also are in need of intervention. Teachers experienced in working with this age group recognize the adolescent's need for support and a sense of security as they struggle between autonomy and self doubt. Class and teacher changes for the seven periods of the school day created a fluid environment which contributed to school adjustment problems. Modifications in the instructional program to bolster academic achievement were needed and socio-emotional development had to be addressed. Turn Around for Successful Citizenship (TASC), an alternative education program developed by teachers, the counseling staff, and school administrators, was initiated during the 1988-89 school year to meet the needs of "at risk" youth. Students chosen for this program demonstrated a certain degree of alienation from the majority of the student body evidenced by many of the characteristics peculiar to the OWA population. These students, however, were not seen as lacking academic competence but were more "turned

off" to traditional education. The instructional program for the TASC unit focused on computer assisted instruction, cooperative learning projects, and limited use of text books. The counseling staff invited a number of guest speakers to address the students on topics related to social-emotional development. However, the speakers were invited as scheduling permitted and there was little or no continuity with respect to the topics presented.

The program, now beginning its third year in operation, has somewhat shifted its focus with less involvement from the counseling staff and total autonomy by the teachers to determine instructional strategies. However, the program maintains its goal to provide a nontraditional educational plan for students during these transitional years.

**The Writer's Role In The Work Setting**

One may need to clarify a student's needs in order to develop and implement appropriate strategies for behavioral intervention. The school psychologist ofttimes fulfills this expectation. This writer assumed the position as the school psychologist in the junior high school when the school district made the transition

from K-8th; 9th-12th grade organization to elementary, junior, and senior high schools.

The role of the school psychologist with alternative educational programs shifts from primarily being child study (i.e. individual assessment) to behavioral consultation. In many instances, the behavior of the student along with academic deficits may be the stated reason for referring the student to an alternative educational program. That being the case, behavioral consultation becomes the writer's primary role in working with this population. Various aspects of this role include communicating to students the purpose for planned interventions. Ongoing communication with teachers and the school administration gives necessary feedback as to the efficacy of specified interventions. In alternative educational settings, making changes in student's behavior requires an intensive effort. One must explore what contributing factors led to the student's alienation and determine what changes may work to the student's advantage. Though it's everyone's realization that there are no quick fixes, we have moved beyond confusion and contention into establishing a reclaiming

environment. As defined by Brendtro (1990), "Reclaiming requires moving beyond deviance and dysfunction to address the young person's most basic unmet needs (p.57)."

# CHAPTER II

## Study Of The Problem

### Problem Description

The problem is that students enrolled in alternative education programs have not achieved a high level of prosocial competence. This leads to inadequate emotional and/or behavioral adjustment in the school setting which increases the rate of disciplinary referrals. Many of the students entering alternative educational programs have been counseled, cajoled, bribed, threatened, and ignored in the past largely due to the frustration on the adult's part to find some way to "reach" the student. In many instances, the student has learned to manipulate the system in order to fulfill their own needs and desires which may be in contradiction to the goals of the educational system.

Remediation, cooperative learning, and teaching to the child's learning style have all been emphasized in preparing teachers for nontraditional classroom settings. Adolescents are making the transition from a concrete level of thinking to a more formal level. As discussed by Brazee and Smalley (1982), this is the period during which the child may be unable to make a

distinction between what is important and what is not important and they will need to have a concrete experience or have an idea related to a concrete experience in order to understand the concept. Though adolescents may want to present themselves as being autonomous and detached from parental authority, the need for supervision and structure is still a very real part of their psyche. The junior high school setting lends a lessening of structure and supervision which makes the existence of alternative programs even more justifiable. By providing a self contained setting for part of the school day, the teacher and student are able to establish a stronger emotional bond taking away from the adolescent's need to seek guidance and reinforcement from the peer group.

Disciplinary interventions are designed as punitive measures with a failure to link a particular intervention with a specific behavioral infraction but the perceived degree of disruption created by the infraction may dictate the degree of punishment. The rate of recidivism with respect to disciplinary referrals would raise questions as to the effectiveness of the disciplinary program.

The absence of a specific and consistent behavioral plan increases the likelihood for a student to commit a behavioral infraction. In addition, the student needs a strong incentive to develop and sustain a problem solving approach which is a necessary ingredient to increase the level of prosocial competence. Problem solving abilities give the adolescent a greater ability to generate alternative solutions, to specify the consequences of those solutions, and to select more adequate solutions. The adolescents' consideration and coordination of conflicting points of view dictates their level of prosocial competency.

Simply stated, the situation that needs to addressed is the lack of prosocial competencies among "at risk" students.

**Problem Documentation**

Student discipline referrals for a representative number of students enrolled in the OWA and TASC programs were reviewed at the end of the 1989-1990 school year. Six of the disciplinary folders were for females enrolled in the program and twelve were male students. Disciplinary infractions were categorized into four major divisions.

that point and the teacher had lost control. Physical assaults most often occurred in unstructured or loosely structured settings such as the hallway during a class change, the lunchroom, or playground. Confrontations were rarely spontaneous but generally resulted from a past incident left unresolved and the student's inadequate repertoire of ways to handle situations of conflict. Many of the students were reactive, lacking the problem solving skills to more adequately respond to incitement.

The majority of the violations (75) fell within the category of classroom disruptions. These disruptions typically resulted from attention seeking behaviors. For example, objects thrown in the classroom were frequently cited, taunting and agitating behaviors both verbal and nonverbal were another typical source of classroom disruption. Profane language was commonly used. If students persisted with the inappropriate behavior after being asked by the teacher to discontinue the action, a disciplinary referral ensued.

Truancy or tardiness resulted in the final category of disciplinary referrals with 31 violations. It probably did not take long for the student to come to

the realization that he would accumulate fewer disciplinary referrals if he remained truant from school over several days than to arrive late to class many times during the school day.

Disciplinary actions taken in response to office referrals were more related to the seriousness of the infraction. Though there was a 100% intent to contact the parent or guardian, efforts were successful 75% to 80% of the time. Telephone contacts were preferred but many of the student's homes lacked this utility. Written communications were sent but receipt by the intended party was far from guaranteed. The increase in the number of working parents allowed the student an early home arrival and an opportunity to intercept the mail. While the writer agrees with the school's efforts to keep the parent informed, there should not be an expectation that the parent can solve the problem. In fact, with increasing frequency, the parents are calling the school asking for help with their incorrigible child.

The student was actually penalized in less than 50% of the cases. This small percentage of disciplinary actions over and beyond a contact with the parent

strained the relationship between the referring teacher and the school administration. Nothing created more disillusionment with administration than to have students repeatedly referred to the office only to have them returned to the classroom with merely a chastisement (the revolving door referral). Punishments for minor infractions included lunchroom detention, after school detention, or a referral to in-school suspension. In in-school suspension, a writing task was typically assigned. This generally involved copying an essay which carried a message though the message was more than likely overlooked as the student merely focused on the mechanics of the task. Teachers also gave writing assignments as disciplinary interventions within the classroom setting. Failure to complete in class writing assignments resulted in a disciplinary referral (noncompliance with teacher's directions).

Only 10 to 15% of the students were officially suspended from school. The word officially is stressed for there were instances in which the school administrator and parent reached an agreement to keep a student out of school for a period of time but not

report it as a school suspension. That left the student's record clean and left a more favorable impression with central administration when suspension rates were reported for the school year. Only 1% of the total student body were expelled from school.

Rating scales are a widely used assessment tool in the identification of social skills deficits and/or prosocial competencies. One such rating scale, The Structured Learning Skill Checklist (SLSC) identifies skill proficiencies and deficiencies by having the rater respond to descriptions of skills taught in the Structured Learning program. Teachers familiar with the student's behavior can rate social skill performance on a continuum from never performed to always performed assigning a numerical value for each skill. Pre and post assessment using the Skill Checklist will allow for additional documentation of social skill performance. The SLSC is presented in Skillstreaming the Adolescent (Goldstein, 1980), and the developer of the Structured Learning program, Dr. Arnold Goldstein, readily consents and actually encourages the use of any materials related to the program.

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) is a multirater assessment of student social behaviors which, for the purpose of this practicum, will provide a self report measure of social competence. The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), analyzes common core behaviors directly related to prosocial competence. The use of the SSRS as a pre and post assessment will allow for a measurement of changes in the students' perception of his or her level of prosocial competence. A distinction can also be made between acquisition deficits (skill never learned or acquired) and performance deficits (skill inconsistently performed) for intervention planning.

**Causative Analysis**

So what has created the ever widening circle of alienated youth lacking the interpersonal skills which serve as a basis for prosocial competence? Increasingly, there is a tendency to assign blame for the problem with society blaming the schools, the schools blaming the parents, the parents taking a defensive stance and assigning blame to anyone or anything other than themselves, and the child accepting no responsibility for his inadequacies. In past

generations prior to the explosion in the number of females in the work place, a number of adults be they relatives, neighbors, or friends shared in the rearing and nurturing of the child. Brendtro (1990) described that spirit of belonging as a powerful social value that transformed human relationships. Similarly, the church or other social agencies augmented the feeling of self worth which took root within the family unit and was nourished by these social support networks. Educational systems have come to recognize the absence of these support networks and the school becomes a focal point in terms of recapturing this sense of belonging. Diane Divoky (1975) explores the question of whether or not the school should assume this added responsibility.

> ...Whether school should be taking on the emotional and moral development of youngsters is an overwhelming question, yet one that has barely been considered in the rush to buy programs. Should schools - given their limited and spotty success in meeting the more measurable and modest goals of teaching reading and computation skills - really undertake the enormously more difficult and complicated responsibilities that affective

> education implies? Should teachers - who pretend to no higher level of ethics or sensitivity than any other citizen - try to become humanists/psychologists/social workers/exemplars of values (p.23)?

Given the kinds of stresses in today's society which the adolescent must deal with, the questions are presented rhetorically.

One of the major stresses which the adolescent faces is the transition from an elementary to secondary school environment. This changing school environment tends to exaggerate problems which children bring with them as they also cope with their emerging state of adolescence.

Safer (1986) emphasizes two areas of "stress" which have the greatest influence on behavioral and/or educational maladjustment. First, the greater academic requirements in the secondary school present a particular problem for academically deficient youth. Secondly, the open and fluid secondary school environment adds increased opportunities for deviance particularly for the student with social skills deficits.

Alternative educational programs are designed to reduce the aforementioned stresses by providing a more structured and protective environment for students. The achievement deficits are addressed by modifications in the curriculum and remediation. By limiting the number of interactions during the school day, a subsequent reduction in disruptive behaviors is expected. The fallacy in this approach is the desire to shelter the school and/or the child from an anticipated problem without directly addressing the problem (i.e. the student's social skills deficits). The guidance and counseling program, through speakers and films provided information and activities related to interpersonal relations on an ongoing basis. In fact, in an end of the year report, the staff listed speakers and videotapes which were presented to students in the alternative education units covering topics as diverse as death and dying, violence free relationships, the criminal justice system, and children of alcoholics. Only the sessions covering violence free relationships were extended over two weeks with the majority of sessions designed for a single class period.

One cannot discount efforts made by human service professionals to help troubled youth, yet the real goal is to give the direction which will allow youth to help themselves. Brendtro (1983) made the observation that educational and treatment programs striving to build self esteem must design ways for young people to take greater charge of their own lives. "Inadvertently, those who strive to be the saviors of children may actually keep them small and helpless (p. 72)."

Can the adult definition of social competence differ from that of an adolescent? Gresham (1986) defines social competence as an evaluative construct based upon judgments within stated criteria that a task has been performed adequately. In contrast, social skills are the specific behaviors which the individual exhibits in order to perform competently on the task. The perceived social importance of exhibiting certain behaviors in particular situations lends social validity. It is at that point where the adult viewpoint of social competence may differ significantly from that of the adolescent.

One must take into account social significance in the assessment and treatment of social skills deficits.

Gresham classified social skill problems into four general areas: skill deficits, performance deficits, self control skill deficits, and self control performance deficits. Children with skill deficits do not have the necessary social skills to interact appropriately with peers whereas a performance deficit represents the child with social skills who chooses not to perform them at acceptable levels. This is reminiscent of our parent's admonition to be on our best behavior when company was expected. That would assume the child's ability to distinguish between acceptable vs. unacceptable patterns of behavior.

One must make the distinction as to whether or not factors such as a lack of motivation enter into the formula for assisting prosocial competency. Also, the child's temperament, taking into account such factors as impulsivity and other forms of emotional arousal, may create self control skill deficits. The emotional state impacts on social interactions which can lead to rejection which prevents the social skill acquisition. An occasionally aroused state may lead to inconsistent performance of a skill but, in that case, the skill has been learned but may not be consistently exhibited.

Alschuler and Shea (1974) question the benefits of external attempts to control student behavior finding such attempts to be ineffective in teaching internal self regulation. Their concept of social literacy alludes to an ability to see, name, analyze and transform reality. "Powerless to name, analyze, and transform our social relationships, we remain victimized by them (p. 86)."

Social skill performance is influenced by the characteristics of the environment and childrearing practices. Though much of the research examines the mother-child dyad, Swanson (1988) found a positive relationship between paternal nurturance and the development of prosocial behavior. Qualities such as generosity were found to be acquired through identification with warm, nurturant fathers. Children demonstrating prosocial behaviors were generally linked with nurturant and empathetic caregivers. These parents adopted an authoritative childrearing style characterized by consistent, loving, conscientious and secure handling of their children. Brendtro (1990) makes the observation that a permissive, overindulgent parenting style may place the child at risk.

> Self esteem may be lowered because the child is unsure of what is valued and what behaviors will gain approval.
>
> Delinquency may be reinforced as adults keep giving another chance.
>
> Aggression increases if permissiveness is paired with adult hostility (p.22).

It is also necessary to keep in mind that peer standards of socially acceptable behavior may vary from the adult's perspective. In fact, Gresham (1986) presents a model of social competence based on the level of acceptability within the peer group. Given this model, a child may be labeled as socially deficient without being able to identify which behaviors led to peer rejection. Similarly, one would have to take into account the make up of the peer group. As discussed by Kennedy (1988), factors such a socioeconomic status and race may dictate the norm for the peer group. The degree of social skill proficiency or deficiency may need to be determined within the context of the child's milieu, however certain base line criteria can be set to judge social competence across settings.

**Relationship of the Problem to the Literature**

Another factor which has been shown to influence prosocial competence is the adolescent's self concept. Comer, Haynes, Hamilton-Lee, Boger, and Rollock (1987) studied the relationship between specific dimensions of children's self concept and their social competence using multirater assessments. The study used black, middle school students and generalizability of the findings beyond that population was cautioned. Teachers often mention negative self concept in citing reasons for a student's misbehavior leading to a proliferation of programs and strategies to raise self esteem. The teacher's assessment, however, tends to be purely judgmental with an absence of hard data to support the claim. Comer et. al. examined specific dimensions of self concept such as feelings of personal worth, views of physical appearance, and moral worth equating the student's ratings of self concept and social competence with parent and teacher ratings of the student's social competence. Findings from the study supported a phenomenological conception of self concept meaning individuals know more about themselves and how they feel about themselves than anyone else. The study lends

support to the use of self report measures of behavior to assess social competence. Another finding of particular significance was that teacher's evaluations of the student's social competence did not correlate significantly with children's self concept. That finding stressed the importance of the social context outside of school as having a strong impact on self esteem. Support systems such as the church, community agencies and parents of African-American children carried a large responsibility to find innovative ways to enhance the self concept of African American children.

In a study which examined teacher perceptions of social behavior, Center and Wascom (1987) found sex and age differences in teacher's perceptions of both prosocial and antisocial behavior. Females were perceived to have more prosocial behavior and less antisocial behavior than males. There appeared to be a perceived increase in antisocial behavior during early adolescence even with typically normally functioning students. That would suggest a social skills training group initiated in a junior high school setting may be composed of a majority of males. The trainer should

keep in mind that greater independence striving during the period of early adolescence tends to increase the likelihood of conflict and the increased emphasis on social relations during this period results in more opportunities to engage in both prosocial as well as negative interactions.

The literature on social skills has largely been devoted to an analysis of social skills deficits, assessment, and treatment. Morrison & Bellack (1981) conducted a review of the literature to evaluate the role of social perception and/or social sensitivity to social competence. Social perception was defined a number of ways but, in general, it was related to an individual's ability to accurately interpret cues or messages in interpersonal situations. The literature reached the conclusion that social perception increases with age for with age comes experience with social interactions. Some data suggested that children who are poorly adjusted interpersonally may differ in social sensitivity when confronted with stressful emotions as would occur in situations of conflict. One observation made by teachers in alternative education programs is that students tend to be reactive and lack problem

solving approaches. The lack of social sensitivity can be addressed in social skills training through methods such as role play, modeling, and feedback. Just as social skill deficits can be more accurately defined as acquisition deficits vs. performance deficits (Gresham, 1986), response deficits may also be differentiated from perception deficits. In addition, perception deficits may result from a number of different problems.

> For example, an individual may reach inaccurate conclusions about the environment because he/she: (a) fails to listen to the interpersonal partner, (b) fails to look, (c) fails to integrate what he/she has seen and heard, (d) does not know the meaning of what has been seen and heard, or (e) looks or listens for cues which are not relevant at the moment (Morrison and Bellack, 1981, p. 76).

The literature on social perception broadened the area of social skills training for adequate social performance not only requires a repertoire of skills, but knowledge of when and how to use these skills. The individual must be able to "read" the social environment operating within the norms and conventions for a

particular setting, and be able to accurately interpret and process the emotions and intentions of others.

Social perception could also be viewed more in relation to social cognitive abilities. The comprehensive theory of moral development proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg viewed the individual as progressing through stages, separate and distinct from each other, and defined as structures or systems of cognitive organization.

Turiel (1974) in his study of conflict and transition in moral development gives a detailed analysis of the change from Stage 4 reasoning on the Kohlberg Scale as seen with early adolescents and Stage 5 reasoning which emerges in late adolescence. Stage 4 reasoning develops in line with the capacity for abstract thinking emphasizing an orientation toward authority and the maintenance of the social order. This authoritarian bias is operational in interactions with parents, teachers and others in a position of authority. Adolescents with low social competence appear not to have progressed beyond Kohlberg's beginning stages represented by an egoistic orientation. What's right is what satisfies the individual's needs.

Camp (1977) presents another viewpoint in supporting the premise that insufficient ego development may help to account for the impulsivity, inability to delay gratification and poor behavioral control as observed with youth who lack internal controls. A differentiation is made between associative processing, a more primitive form of cognitive functioning peculiar to young children and cognitive processing characteristic of higher order thinking and reasoning skills. Those who relied on associative processing had difficulty inhibiting responses and failed to use verbal mediation in problem solving. That seemed to parallel the theory of moral development in the analysis of the developmental stages. Turiel made the assumption the adolescents who appeared to have regressed to an earlier stage of development had actually progressed to the appropriate developmental level yet there was a distinction made between the individual and society. These same adolescents, if given an opportunity to be in a position of authority may set stringent rules under which their system should operate suggesting a recognition of the need for social order. Yet their narcissism and fragile self esteem drives them to

# Chapter III

## Anticipated Outcomes And Evaluation Instruments

### Statement of General Goals

Focusing on a population of students enrolled in alternate educational programs in a junior high school setting, the primary goal was to increase prosocial competencies during the period of early adolescence. In attaining this goal, it was proposed that school based disciplinary procedures would be coordinated with intervention strategies.

### Behavioral Expectations/Standard Of Performance

In assessing skill proficiencies and deficiencies, one can evaluate how well the adolescent uses a variety of social, personal, and interpersonal skills. The lack of skill proficiencies is translated into behavioral difficulties necessitating disciplinary interventions. Not only is it important to know how others view the adolescent's behavior, but the adolescent must be given the opportunity to evaluate himself which may lead to a greater awareness of skill proficiencies and deficiencies. Recognizing the need to build skill

proficiencies, the behavioral objectives for this practicum were as follows:

1. To bring about a positive performance change in at least 20% of the skill areas as measured by pre and post testing on a teacher rating scale (Structured Learning Skills Checklist - SLSC).

2. To bring about a 20% decrease in the number of office referrals for students enrolled in social skills training sessions from the first week of program implementation to the final week of the training program.

3. To bring the student's social skill performance within one standard deviation above or below the standardization sample comparison group mean using a pre and post self report measure of social competency (Social Skills Rating Scale - SSRS).

**Assessment Instruments**

The first objective was measured by having the teacher complete the SLSC before and after the implementation period. The SLSC required the rater to respond to descriptions of skills taught in a social skills training program in terms of the student's actual use of the skill. By using the Checklist before and

after the implementation period, skill levels were recorded in order to discern increases in proficiency in each skill for which training was undertaken.

To measure the second objective, office referral forms for students enrolled in the training program were collected on a weekly basis to allow for monitoring of behavioral infractions.

The third objective was measured by having the student complete a social skills questionnaire which was part of the SSRS. By using this norm referenced instrument, performance was measured against a standardization sample comparison group. The standardization sample included a representative mix by sex and grade level. Even though only the Scale raw score was used to measure the objective, subscale ratings also provided valuable information for training purposes.

**Reporting Of The Data**

A skill checklist summary was prepared for each trainee which recorded pretest and post-test ratings as well as a performance change designated by plus or minus. Ratings for all students enrolled in the training program were recorded on a Skill Training Grouping Chart which provided a visual summary of ratings of proficiency and deficiency in all skills.

The social skills summary from the SSRS was completed for each trainee before and after the implementation period. The scoring summary provided descriptive Behavior Levels for each subscale as well as the Social Skills Scale. A chart outlining disciplinary referrals and action taken was developed and maintained for the duration of the training sessions.

# CHAPTER IV

## Solution Strategy

### Review Of Possible Solutions

The situation that needed to be addressed was the lack of prosocial competencies among "at risk" students. Alternative educational programs have been developed for students with documented academic and behavioral difficulties, however these programs do not have a component designed to address social deficiencies. Social skills deficits may be predictive of social adjustment problems and can lead to serious psychopathology later in life (Elliot, Gresham, and Heffer, 1987). Particularly during the storm and stress period of adolescence, students with social deficiencies may demonstrate behavior problems resulting in disciplinary actions. Interpersonal relationships are changing during early adolescence as the difficult transition between childhood and young adulthood is underway.

School psychologists, with a background in developmental as well as educational psychology, can lead efforts to bridge the gap between research and practice with respect to social competency. As pointed

3) the need to implement management approaches that counter irresponsibility and rebellion by mobilizing youth involvement

4) the need to present programs which promote prosocial competency in youth whose lives are self centered and lacking purpose (p. 57).

Hops and Greenwood (1988) point out how recent events have combined to renew scientific and clinical interest in children's social development. Economic and social conditions have produced large numbers of working parents transferring the learning of certain skills outside of the family constellation. Peer interactions have been more closely studied. The short and long term effects of social maladjustment have provided a vast pool for research with particular interest in the inverse relationships between social competence and various forms of psychopathology.

Behavioral assessment and intervention bear a close relationship to each other. Acknowledging the fact that behaviors form the core of any training program, assessment must be concerned with pinpointing target behaviors for change, identifying variables in the environment which may influence said behaviors and

identifying the most effective ways to teach targeted skills. The literature is replete with methods, rationales, programs, and strategies for building social competency.

In one middle school setting, a school wide disciplinary plan had been implemented, yet that disciplinary intervention, based on rewards and/or punishments did not have long lasting effects nor were they applicable in all social contexts. The school administrator reported in a practicum report (Parkhurst, 1988) her findings in implementing a program to build prosocial competence. The goal was to introduce a program which included the following components: building of self esteem, strategies for problem solving and decision making, development of critical thinking and communication skills. While one program did not encompass all of the components, activities were designed to supplement the program focusing on conflict resolution. Students displayed an openness and willingness to develop and use problem solving strategies particularly in situations of conflict. The success of this program as with any program designed to increase prosocial competency, was measured by the

student's ability to generalize the skills learned to adaptive functioning in a variety of social situations. As a school administrator, the solution strategy was geared to meet the needs of a general population of students.

In targeting students enrolled in alternative educational programs, these students may be lacking, deficient, or at best, weak in the skills necessary for effective interpersonal functioning. That would suggest the need for active teaching of desirable behaviors. Social skills training programs evolved from social learning theory with systematic curricula designed to teach social behavior. One such program, Structured Learning, began in the early 1970's. As cited in Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Klein (1983), training procedures used are based on social learning research and described as follows: Modeling, which exposes groups of youngsters to vivid examples, role playing, which allows for practice of the skill as a rehearsal for a real life situation, performance feedback allows group members to give helpful suggestions on how the performance might be improved, and transfer of training which promotes the generalization of the newly learned

skill to real life situations. The Structured Learning Program identifies 50 social skills for remediation which fall within six content areas: 1) beginning social skills 2) advanced social skills 3) skills for dealing with feelings 4) skill alternatives to aggression 5) skills for dealing with stress and 6) planning skills. As discussed in the literature (Goldstein & Pentz, 1984), the selection of skills targeted for remediation optimally should reflect not only such parameters as the skill in which the trainee is deficient and the degree of the deficiency, but also the interpersonal and environmental contexts in which the deficiency manifests itself and the particular nature of the deficit. The Structured Learning program is part of a movement in progressive education which incorporated psycho-educational approaches to teach concepts and behaviors relevant to values, morality, and emotional development.

Broen and Greenspan (1983) developed the Socially Adept Verbalizations of Youth (SAVY) curriculum which was designed to develop social judgment skills in socially incompetent youth by decreasing egocentrism and heightening perspective taking skills. The curriculum emphasizes social foresight i.e. an anticipation of the

consequences of various interpersonal interactions. The program presents a three part orientation focusing on temperament, character, and judgment interventions. Temperament oriented interventions are designed to help youth acquire greater insight into their emotional response patterns and build self control. Character oriented interventions incorporate components of social learning techniques to help increase prosocial behavior and decrease anti social behavior. Judgment oriented interventions in training perspective taking allow the students to acquire a better understanding of others and human relationships. The initial field testing for this curriculum was conducted in an alternative school for culturally disadvantaged youth and it was introduced in a two week module within a nine week course on mental health issues. Social foresight training was viewed as a useful addition to the armamentarium of methods intended to prevent or diminish the development of socially incompetent behaviors.

The effectiveness of social problem solving as a primary feature of social competency was examined in study conducted by Tisdelle and St. Lawrence (1988). Failure to weigh alternative courses of action, lack of

consideration for long term vs. short term consequences, and failure to choose a relevant and effective behavioral solution were all considered as integral components of the problem solving process. The study was conducted as a comparison study between conduct disordered adolescents and normal youths. Five problem solving component skills were taught: 1) problem identification; 2) goal definition; 3) generation of alternatives; 4) comparison of consequences; and 5) selection of the best alternative. Training consisted of providing a rationale and instruction for the component, modeling the skill, practicing the skill and feedback and verbal reinforcement of skill usage. Following the training, all students exhibited verbal improvement of the problem solving component skills. The conduct disordered adolescents learned verbally to identify problems, define outcome goals, generate alternative courses of action, and select a reasonable course of action at a performance level equal to their adjusted peers. However, acquisition of these cognitive skills did not translate into improved behavioral adjustment. What seemed to be lacking in the transfer

of training was some one in various social contexts to provide continuous prompts and feedback.

**The Selected Solution**

Brendtro and Ness (1983) pragmatically weigh strategies for building social competency and outline stages for intervention. The initial goal is viewed as an effort to discover how the adolescent views the situation. A sequence of events (antecedent and consequent events) must be carefully analyzed in order to clarify distortions in the adolescent's perceptions. With the support of an adult and/or peer group trainees, alternative solutions may be explored. These stages for intervention take into account the fact that the physical performance of a social behavior should not be considered in isolation, but cognitive and affective aspects of social behavior are equally important. Skills training with a special needs population must rest on firm, investigative foundation. Procedures must be introduced which can be reinforced by others outside of the training sessions.

Structured Learning allows for a conjoint style of intervention using input from teachers, students, as well as the group facilitator. Social validation is

taken into consideration since students are directly involved in the selection of skills designated for training purposes. By "negotiating the curriculum", the trainer and trainee can compare, contrast, examine, and select from a repertoire of skills taking into account the trainer's beliefs about what the trainee needs coupled with the trainee's beliefs about his/her deficiencies. Teachers are directly involved in the assessment procedures and indirectly involved with the treatment program primarily through activities designed to promote a transfer of training. Disciplinary interventions can be designed in such a way as to enhance the transfer of training. Though the training program is structured, it allows for the introduction of other techniques such as coaching or verbal mediation as students move through the Structured Learning procedures. The program places the responsibility to make changes on the student through introspection (self report), training, and skill generalization. Perspective taking skills are also enhanced as successful use of Structured Learning forces the adolescent to see matters from other people's viewpoints and it also leads to increases in cooperative behavior.

The program has successfully been used in programs designed for students with severe behavior disorders as well as intervention programs for a less severe population. In final analysis, the Structured Learning training model best fits the goals and objectives of this practicum.

**Procedures For Implementation**

Teacher training:

It was proposed that an in-service would be presented to teachers and the school administrator to explain the Structured Learning program and to outline activities which would promote a transfer of training from skills groups to the general school environment. Disciplinary intervention strategies, such as skill reports, were to be discussed to demonstrate how the social skills training sessions may impact on maladaptive behaviors. These activities were planned for week 1 of the implementation period.

Student selection:

Based on a review of school records and informal contacts with teachers, students enrolled in alternative educational programs were nominated for the skill training sessions. Teachers or school administrators

who were familiar with the students' behavior were asked to complete the SLSC. Skill checklist summaries were completed for each student. The Skill Training Grouping Chart was completed for the social skills group. Disciplinary records on file at the beginning of the implementation period were collected for group participants. These activities were planned for week 2 of the implementation period.

Student orientation:

At an initial training session, students were introduced to the Structured Learning Model. Terminology such as show, try, discuss and practice was used for training purposes to represent major components of the program i.e., modeling, role play, performance feedback and transfer of training. A regular schedule and location for training sessions was determined and group rules were established for the training sessions. The SSRS was completed by participants. These activities were planned for week 4 of the implementation period.

Group organization:

Students were given copies of their skill checklist summaries. Through general discussion relating the various skills to perceived relevance and frequency of

use, skills were selected for training purposes by group consensus. By reviewing the areas of behavioral deficiencies as plotted on the Skills Training Grouping Chart, skills were selected for training purposes. These activities were planned during week 5 of the implementation period.

The Structured Learning Model

The concept of modeling was introduced through the use of videotaped vignettes developed and performed by school mates. Skill cards were used to help group participants follow the behavioral steps as they were performed. The concept of modeling, i.e. imitation, was discussed in the context of how modeling could be influenced by factors such as peer pressure, values, inhibitory and disinhibitory effects. Group participants were supposed to develop scripts to act out in role play in order to address skills selected for training purposes. By use of practice, performance feedback and observation, the students did role play various skills. Role playing served as a behavioral rehearsal for future use of a skill being taught. Students were going to demonstrate transfer of training

by group discussion of situations as reported by teachers (skill reports) in which the skill was not demonstrated and a disciplinary action ensued. Studentswere supposed to review the action, and define a more favorable outcome if the Structured Learning Model had been followed. Students were going to complete student skill reports as a transfer enhancement procedure. These activities were planned for weeks 6 to 11 of the implementation period.

Program evaluation:

At the completion of the training program, there was a general review of the training program. The SSRS was again completed by the students. The SLSC was completed by teachers. Disciplinary records were reviewed. This activity occurred during the 12th week of the implementation period.

# CHAPTER V

## RESULTS, DISCUSSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this practicum was to focus attention on the lack of prosocial competencies with "at risk" students. A social skills training program was implemented with students drawn from alternative educational programs within a junior high school setting. The alternative educational programs lacked a component to address socio-behavioral issues. However, academic and/or behavioral characteristics of students chosen to participate in programs developed for "at risk" students would suggest a need to assess and develop prosocial competencies with this population. In addition, by increasing prosocial competencies, referrals for disciplinary interventions were expected to decline.

The Structured Learning program which evolved from social learning theory provided a systematic curricula for social skills training. It provided the means for modeling, role playing, performance feedback, as well as transfer of training. Rating scales were also provided to assist with the identification of prosocial skills and deficits.

Eight students were selected for the social skills training group based on teacher nominations and ratings from the teacher rating scale. Five to eight trainees with two trainers is recommended as the optimal size for a skills training group (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1980), however attrition was expected given the make up of the group. By the end of the implementation period, only five out of the original eight trainees had attended more than 50% of the training sessions and they were included in the measurement of the objectives.

**Results**

The first objective for this practicum was stated as follows: To bring about a positive performance change in at least 20% of the skill areas as measured by pre and post testing on a teacher rating scale (SLSC).

As shown in Table 1, the objective was met with four out of five members of the skills training group.

The second objective for the practicum read as follows: To bring about a 20% decrease in the number of office referrals for students enrolled in social skills training sessions from the first week of program implementation to the final week of the training program. As shown in Table 2, the objective was met with three out of five social skills trainees.

Table 1

Percentage of Positive Performance Change Between Pre and Post Assessment Using the SLSC

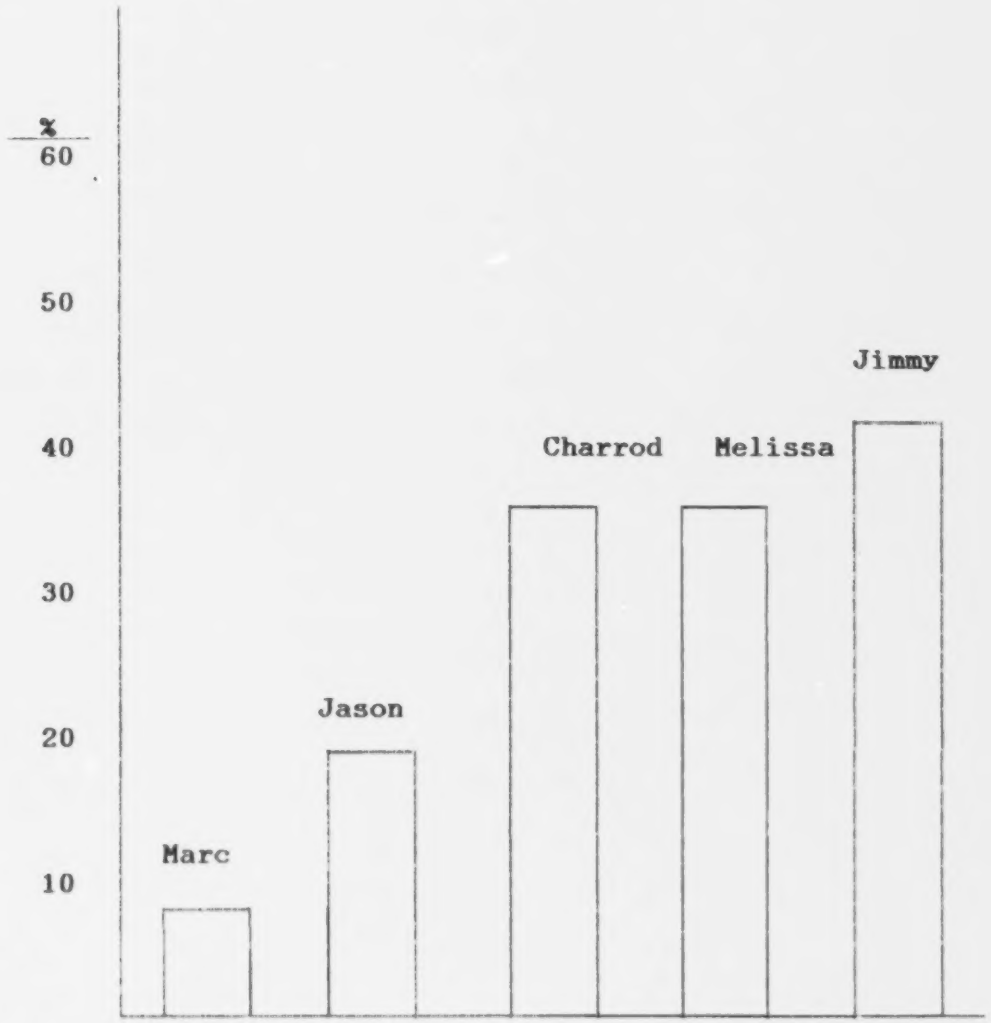

Table 2

Percentage Increase or Decrease in Disciplinary Referrals Following Social Skills Training

| | No. referrals prior to 10-22-90 | No. referrals from 10-22-90 to 1-9-91 | % change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Melissa | 5 | 0 | 100% decrease |
| Jimmy | 5 | 3 | 40% decrease |
| Charrod | 1 | 3 | 300% increase |
| Marc | 22 | 10 | 55% decrease |
| Jason | 5 | 10 | 50% increase |

The third objective for the practicum was stated as follows: To bring the student's social skill performance within one standard deviation above or below the standardization sample comparison group mean using a pre and post self report measure of social competency (SSRS).

As shown in Table 3, the objective was met with two out of five members of the skills training group.

**Table 3**

**Difference Between Self Report Measure of Social Skills Trainee and Standardization Sample Comparison Group**

SSRS Mean = 100 Standard Deviation (SD) = 15

| Trainee | Pre/Post Test Standard | Comparison with Standardization |
|---|---|---|
| Marc | 100/117 | Above 1 SD |
| Melissa | 62/61 | Below 1 SD |
| Jason | 100/95 | Within 1 SD |
| Charrod | 82/78 | Below 1 SD |
| Jimmy | 97/85 | Within 1 SD |

## Discussion

### Self report measures of social competency

The self report measures of social competency seemed influenced by factors such as social perception, motivation, and peer group standards. Of the two students with ratings at least one standard deviation below the standardization group, one seemed to lack motivation throughout the training sessions and the other has struggled with identity vs. role confusion largely encumbered by a diagnosed perceptual handicap.

In considering the subscale ratings, the student with the lack of motivation also seemed to have a lack of concern related to areas measured on the SSRS. The subscale labeled cooperation focused on the student's ability to comply with rules and directions in the home and school setting. This was a student who had moved out of her home due to the unstable relationship between she and her mother. Class cutting was her primary offense in the school setting. The subscale labeled empathy measured the student's concern and respect for other's feelings and viewpoints. Actually this student did value the opinions of others yet she rarely gave positive feedback to others possibly due to her own lack

of experience in receiving positive feedback. The self control subscale measured the student's reactions in situations of conflict and she, like most other "at risk" students did not utilize a problem solving approach. Only with the category labeled "assertive" did she give herself high marks for initiating behaviors which primarily measured those behaviors involving members of the opposite sex.

The trainee diagnosed as perceptually handicapped seemed unable to benefit from social cues and was typically rejected by peer group members. That created added confusion by his not being able to identify what social skill proficiencies or deficiencies contributed to his peer rejection. Unlike the other trainees, self control was not a problem area for him for he had adopted a conciliatory demeanor in order to avoid or diminish situations of conflict. In completing the rating scale, indecisiveness was apparent which generally led to a choice of an intermediate rating for most items. Actual knowledge of the level of social skill functioning would have to come from outside evaluators with careful explanation of each social skill category provided for this trainee.

At the other end of the spectrum, one trainee rated himself greater than one standard deviation above the standardization group. This was the one student referred and evaluated for a special education program with behavior disorders as the handicapping condition. The social skills ratings gave evidence of the difficulty this student has with social perception as well as fragile ego development. This student's self descriptions formulated an ego identity which was in direct contrast to observable behaviors. The high social skills ratings gave a sense of what he wanted to be and it also suggested other people s opinions of him were important to him. This student did possess a repertoire of social skills, however self control performance deficits seemed to be the underlying cause for poor social functioning.

**Disciplinary interventions**

Disciplinary interventions were the primary shortcoming of this practicum. A number of factors contributed to the failure to coordinate the social skills training with the in-school suspension (ISS) program. First and foremost, teachers were not as well acquainted with the program as had originally been

planned. The practicum was implemented at the end of a grading quarter, a time when teachers focus on grades and conferences with little tolerance for the introduction of new programs. Teachers, however, were very supportive of the program concept recognizing the need for support personnel to address issues related to social-emotional development. Indivi- dual contacts were made with teachers focusing primarily on the selection of students for the social skills group. Disciplinary referrals were collected at the beginning of the implementation period. The referrals did not always list the infraction making it impossible to categorize the referrals in order to develop transfer of training activities. The frequency of referrals so early in the school year was another area of concern. Some students were sent to ISS on nearly a daily basis leaving one to question the effectiveness of the ISS program. In meeting with the ISS coordinator, a question was raised regarding the possibility of restructuring the program. The coordinator agreed a change was needed but administra- tor and teacher opposition quelled his motivation to promote change. Frequent absences of the ISS coordinator also led to a

revision of plans. It was clear that transfer of training activities could not be consistently implemented with the existing disciplinary program.

The decision was made to build into the training program an activity designed primarily to promote transfer of training. This was accomplished during the week the students left for the winter vacation period. A homework assignment was given and telephone contacts were made with each student during the break to assess their progress. When the group reassembled following the break, this project was a primary topic of discussion.

A decrease in disciplinary referrals was noted for three out of five students. Two of the students were from the OWA program. The OWA teacher rarely made disciplinary referrals for she recognized the behaviors characteristic of the "at risk" population and tried to help the students work through those behaviors in the classroom setting. This teacher and the social skills group trainer maintained weekly contact sharing insight and observations related to students in the group.

The students showing an increase in disciplinary referrals were from the TASC group. Teachers for this

program seemed less tolerant of behaviors typically found with "at risk" students. It was not at all unusual to find students from this program being sent to ISS on a daily basis. The social skills group trainer also found these teachers more likely to give negative feedback regarding students enrolled in the program. One of the students from the TASC unit did show a decrease in referrals, however that was due to lengthy out of school suspensions which lessened the referrals to ISS.

**Teacher rating scale data**

The only student in the training group who did not meet this objective was the student referred for special education placement. This student has demonstrated a pattern of behaviors over many years which would suggest the need for a therapeutically based educational program. Even in social skills group, he presented a pattern of aggressive behaviors characterized by impulsivity, an inability to delay gratification, and inadequate behavioral controls. Though positive contributions were occasionally noted, there was no evidence of any transfer of training.

**Recommendations**

Recommendation one:

Make social skills training an integral part of the curriculum in programs designed for "at risk" students. Timnick (1982) found a growing demand for social skills training programs.

> Programs to prevent or correct deficiencies in these areas are springing up throughout the United States, despite lack of agreement on what social skills are, which ones are essential, and how they can best be developed.

Critics of social skills programs argue that the teaching of socially desirable behaviors should come from the home, not schools. However, in the absence of home training, the school is still confronted with a growing number of students demonstrating maladaptive behaviors.

Students enrolled in alternative educational programs typically present a pattern of disruptive behaviors along with poor interpersonal relationships. The alternative programs developed to serve this population of students lack a clear and consistent plan to address behavioral concerns.

Few would argue the point that there is a need to improve interpersonal skills and teach problem solving approaches with the "at risk " population. However, not everyone may have the requisite skills to teach as obscure a concept as social skills. One must possess knowledge of and respect for the peer culture. A delicate balance must be drawn between allowing for individuality while moving the child closer to a socially acceptable norm.

Recommendation two:

Timnick (1982) makes the point that students do seem to draw benefits from social skills training programs, however there was little research to show a transfer of training. Behavioral consultation with teachers may provide for greater implications for social skills training than using a "pull out" approach. Recognizing the need not to dump another program on teachers already overburdened with responsibilities over and beyond basic instruction, basic concepts from social learning theory can be presented. Key behaviors to promote positive social interactions may be identified. Ways of incorporating modeling of these behaviors into

day to day interactions should be examined and demonstrated. There will be occasions when specific situations arise and students may need direct intervention with personnel more highly skilled for conducting social skills group. However, there remains a need to give teachers a minimal level of training to use with the total group.

Recommendation three:

Work with staff and administrators to restructure disciplinary interventions so as to allow elements of social skills training to be part of disciplinary interventions.

Problems related to the ISS center were identified and the data gathered for this report may convince the school administrator to give more attention to finding solutions for these problems. If students are removed from class for disciplinary reasons, it is imperative to provide a clear description of the offense in order for the ISS coordinator to make direct interventions specific to the problem. The purpose of the ISS program, whether it be primarily for punishment or for more constructive purposes, should be defined for both s students and staff.

**Dissemination of Data**

The experience of working with these students does give a basis for the development of a training program for teachers. Teachers may need to target certain behaviors which have greatest likelihood of creating problems with social interactions. A workshop will be developed using social learning theory as a basis for ongoing, in-class social skills training. This workshop will be presented at a national conference focusing on the needs of "at risk" adolescents. In addition, this social skills training project has been registered with the Staff Development Office for presentation at in-service programs within the school district.

A contact was made with the supervisor for OWA programs to discuss the need to address socio-behavioral needs of students enrolled in the program. He indicated there are varying degrees of support for social skills training among his teaching staff. All teachers did provide instruction related to dining etiquette in order to prepare students for an end of the school year banquet. It may be necessary to incorporate another major event for all OWA students which would require the students to focus on certain aspects of social skills development. A concept paper will be developed for further consideration.

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